

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 000104

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE
BAGHDAD FOR HOSTAGE WORKING GROUP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2010
TAGS: PREL KPAO QA ALJAZEERA
SUBJECT: ENTERING ITS TENTH YEAR, AL JAZEERA COVETS GLOBAL
ROLE

REF: A. 05 STATE 217718
 1B. 05 DOHA 1765
 1C. 05 DOHA 1803

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, reasons 1.4 (b&d)

11. (C) Summary: PAO met 1/18 with Wadah Khanfar, Al Jazeera Managing Director, to discuss Ref A demarche and continuing USG concerns with Al Jazeera programming. Khanfar described a series of initiatives planned by Al Jazeera to mark its tenth anniversary year with a view to positioning itself on the global journalistic stage. Khanfar complied 1/19 with PAO's request to provide the Baghdad Hostage Group with a copy of the videotape showing American citizen kidnap victim hostage Jill Carroll with her captors. End summary.

Continuing USG concerns with AJ programming

12. (C) PAO met 1/18 with Wadah Khanfar, Al Jazeera Managing Director, to deliver the most recent DIA unclassified snippets and discuss Ref A demarche. Khanfar said he had not yet received Ref A talking points (delivered 12/15 to ForMin Hamid bin Jassim by the Ambassador) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. PAO summarized continuing USG concerns with the professionalism of Al Jazeera's news and talk show coverage, including the airing of terrorist-provided videotapes; the channel's failure to present a diverse range of opinions or to balance extremist views, in particular where coverage of events in Iraq is concerned; inaccurate reports on coalition military operations in Iraq; failure to adequately double-source on Iraqi reporting; failure to clearly identify sources; failure to run retractions; and continued use of inflammatory language. Khanfar promised a more detailed response to Ref A demarche and the latest unclassified snippets after he had had a chance to review

SIPDIS
them. Meanwhile, he said, he continues to be concerned about the USG's relatively recent insistence that Al Jazeera stop airing insurgent-provided videotapes altogether. He reiterated his previous insistence (Ref B) that Al Jazeera had agreed only to air judiciously-edited portions of such tapes and that he had never agreed to keep them off the air.

Al Jazeera Turns Ten

13. (C) "This year is our tenth anniversary. We are planning many activities to globalize Al Jazeera's style and go international," said Khanfar. Among the initiatives planned are the following, he said.

The International Board of Visitors

14. (C) Khanfar said Al Jazeera has now established an international advisory body consisting of respected international journalism figures to assess and advise on Al Jazeera operations. (Note: The suggestion originated with former Ambassador Rick Burt of the Washington lobby firm of Barbour Griffith Rogers. End note.) The new body, to be known as the Al Jazeera International Board of Visitors, is due to arrive in Doha on February 3, having reviewed Al Jazeera-related material prior to their arrival. The group, which Khanfar said AJ envisions as playing an institutionalized international "quality assurance" role, will spend two days in consultation with the channel's staff in Doha and make its recommendations. The group will hold regular meetings on a three-monthly basis thereafter. According to a list provided by Al Jazeera's head of International and Media Relations (Canadian citizen Satnam Matharu), ten of the Board's proposed 15 members are:

11. Frank Sesno, former CNN Washington Bureau Chief, now professor of public policy and communication at George Mason University.
12. Richard Burt, senior adviser to the Washington Center for Strategic International Studies (CSIS), former U.S. Ambassador and former New York Times correspondent.

13. Christine Ockrent, producer and anchor of France 3 Television's weekly current affairs program, France Europe Express.
14. Josef Jofee, publisher-editor of the German Weekly Die Zeit.
15. Andrew Neil, former BBC journalist, chief executive of The Spectator.
16. Yoichi Funabashi, Foreign Affairs Columnist for the Japanese newspaper, Asahi Shimbun.
17. Allister Sparks, former editor of the South African newspapers the Rand Daily Mail and the Sunday Express, founder of the South African Institute for Advancement of Journalism.
18. Enrique Santos Calderon, Editor of the Colombian newspaper El Tiempo.
19. Fahmy Howeidi, columnist and deputy editor in chief of the Egyptian Al Ahram newspaper.
10. Joseph Samaha, Editor in Chief of the As-Safir newspaper, former Beirut manager of Al Hayat newspaper.

(The complete document with member bios has been emailed as a PDF document to NEA/ARPI Shawn Thorne).

The Second Al Jazeera Forum

15. (C) Khanfar said AJ's second annual forum is scheduled to be held in Doha Jan 31 thru Feb 2 and is entitled: "Defending Freedom, Defining Responsibility." According to Khanfar, more than 250 professional journalists have been invited from Asia, Europe, the USA and the Middle East. (Fox, CNN, ABC and NBC are among the US invitees, he said.) The themes listed in the forum advertising seem to have global, rather than regional, appeal. For example, one panel is entitled: "World Media: Building Walls or Pulling Them Down?" and another, "Media and Power: Democracy versus Dictatorship." One panel, "Al Jazeera in the Mirror" will take "a critical look at Al Jazeera" and at "the so-called 'Al Jazeera Effect' and how satellite television has changed the way information is disseminated. It will also look at the soon-to-be launched English-language channel, Al Jazeera International." (Note for Telesur watchers: Among those expected to attend, according to Matharu, is Andres Izarra, the head of the South American channel.) Khanfar and Matharu urged PAO to attend the conference.

Al Jazeera Training Center expands its programming

16. (C) The Al Jazeera Training Center will keep in step with this 10th-anniversary mode of expansion and internationalization, said Khanfar. The courses will be expanded and upgraded. Instead of short-term courses measured in days or weeks, three-month, six-month and one-year courses will now be offered by the training center. The one-year courses in particular will focus on university graduates, who, despite their technical journalism training, often lack political awareness, he said. The Training Center will seek to offer in-depth courses to such graduates focusing on the philosophical, historical and political aspects of their job. PAO asked about the trainers for these courses. Khanfar replied that the majority of the trainers currently come from the Thomson school of journalism in the UK (Note: as discussed Ref C. End note.). He said Al Jazeera had begun to develop a relationship with the Missouri School of Journalism with an eye to signing a memorandum of understanding with them (Ref C). He said the school's Dean visited Doha and plans were fairly advanced to sign the MOU to implement the expanded course offerings, when the school suddenly pulled back and told AJ that given "the current atmosphere" and the connotations attached to the Al Jazeera name, it might be best to hold back on cementing the relationship between the Missouri School of Journalism.

Khanfar provides copy of hostage tape

17. (C) Following the 1/17 airing by Al Jazeera of a tape showing American citizen hostage Jill Carroll in captivity in Baghdad, PAO reiterated the USG position that such tapes should not be aired. Khanfar replied that Al Jazeera has said from the beginning it would continue to air such tapes but only in edited versions, as it did 1/17. He noted that Al Jazeera continued to broadcast its condemnation of the kidnapping and to call for the release of Carroll and would continue to broadcast interviews with individuals calling for her release during the course of the day. PAO asked Khanfar for a copy of the tape, noting that Embassy Baghdad could use the information possibly to help save Carroll's life. Khanfar hesitated and said, "We have refused every request like this, but let me see what I can do. I have to get some permissions first." A copy of the tape was passed to PAO by AJ on the morning of 1/19.

Comment

18. (C) In pursuing its global ambitions, Al Jazeera has been

quick to take advantage of the wide international media support it garnered in the wake of the Nov 22 UK Daily Mirror story alleging that in April 2004 President Bush had proposed bombing Al Jazeera's Doha headquarters to Prime Minister Tony Blair. (Note: The story has continued to play strongly on Al Jazeera and in the local media, as the channel pursues its efforts to obtain a copy of the classified UK government memorandum allegedly containing details of the exchange. Khanfar confirmed to PAO 1/18 that AJ hired a UK law firm in early January to continue to pursue the matter. End note.) Following the publication of the Daily Mirror story, Khanfar traveled to London claiming he sought the truth about the alleged conversation from the British government. Although the UK government proved unresponsive, Khanfar attracted support for AJ's position among British and international media by organizing various well-publicized press events, including a discussion seminar he co-hosted with the Daily Mirror at the London Press Club. Khanfar is clearly using this support to further his vision of an internationalized AJ. Another element in his favor is the establishment of Al Jazeera International, the English version of the channel, due to be launched later this year. Although there are reports of tension between the staffs of Al Jazeera Arabic and Al Jazeera International, the standing up of AJI, with its growing list of big-name media recruits from all parts of the world, has certainly added a much wider international scope to the Al Jazeera brand name. Al Jazeera Arabic presently has a reported estimated viewership of between 40 and 50 million and targets primarily Arabs, who represent about 18 percent of the Muslim world. AJI, with hubs planned in Doha, Washington, London and Kuala Lumpur, hopes to appeal to the English-speaking remainder of the Muslim world. Together, if their joint vision works out as planned, they will represent a pivotal element in US relations with both the Arab and the Muslim worlds.

Comment continued

19. (C) Al Jazeera's approach to the kidnapping of Christian Science Monitor reporter Jill Carroll seemed to turn on the fact that she is a fellow journalist. The approach fits in with AJ's apparent new strategy of positioning itself as a central player in the global stage of journalism. AJ's airing of the tape was restrained and was accompanied by a forthright condemnation of such acts against journalists worldwide. We feel it is also noteworthy that AJ has continued to air appeals for Carroll's release (including, most recently, an appeal from Jim Carroll, the journalist's father) and continues its iteration of the "solidarity among journalists" theme. Khanfar's decision to share a copy of the tape (which AJ has never done before) may also be a reflection of the importance he places on this theme. It will be interesting to see in what way AJ's approach will differ in future cases where the kidnap victim is not a fellow journalist.

UNTERMEYER